

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6816

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 10395

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT MOPS VS

SUBJECT: CONDITIONS IN VIET NAM AS OF AUGUST 19

1. AN EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD VIETNAMESE BOY OF CHOLON CHINESE ORIGIN, WHO ESCAPED VIET NAM BY SEA ON AUGUST 19, RELATED THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS ON VIET NAM TO A CONGEN OFFICER.

2. BACKGROUND: THE BOY WAS FROM A WEALTHY CHINESE MERCHANT FAMILY. HIS FATHER HAD BEEN INTERROGATED BY OFFICIALS FROM THE NEW GOVERNMENT SOON AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON AND CASTIGATED FOR RENTING PROPERTY TO THE U.S.G. HIS FATHER WAS SHORTLY THEREAFTER SHIPPED OFF FOR "RE-EDUCATION" AND HAS NOT BEEN HEARD FROM SINCE. (COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST CASE WE HAVE NOTED OF A NON-GOVERNMENT PERSON BEING SENT FOR RE-EDUCATION) NVA TROOPS WERE QUARTERED IN THE BOY'S CHOLON HOME.

3. ESCAPE: THE BOY TRAVELED BY ROAD FROM SAIGON TO THE
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DELTA WHERE HE WAS PLACED ON A BOAT. THE ROAD TRIP TOOK

TWO DAYS. THE VEHICLE IN WHICH HE RODE WAS FREQUENTLY STOPPED BY SOLDIERS AND SEARCHED FOR WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION BUT HE WAS NEVER ASKED FOR TRAVEL PAPERS. THE BOY SPECULATED THAT THE DRIVER MIGHT HAVE PAID BRIBES ALONG THE WAY BUT HE NEVER WITNESSED ANY MONEY CHANGE HANDS. DURING THE TRIP THROUGH THE DELTA, HE FREQUENTLY HEARD SMALL ARMS FIRE BUT NEVER WITNESSED A FIRE-FIGHT. HE BELIEVED HIS MOTHER PAID BETWEEN 5-10 MILLION PIASTERS FOR HIS ESCAPE ALTHOUGH SHE NEVER DISCLOSED TO HIM THE PRECISE AMOUNT.

4. CONDITIONS IN SAIGON: ALTHOUGH THERE WAS SUFFICIENT FOOD IN THE MARKET PLACE, MANY PERSONS WERE HUNGRY BECAUSE OF A LACK OF MONEY. NUMEROUS SUICIDES WERE OCCURRING AMONG THE POOR BECAUSE OF HUNGER. MANY POOR PEOPLE WHO WELCOMED THE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT BECAUSE THEY BELIEVED THAT THEY WOULD LIVE WELL IN THE HOUSES OF THE RICH NOW WERE POORER THAN EVER AND HOPED THAT THE AMERICANS WOULD RETURN. THE STUDENT BODIES OF VARIOUS SAIGON SCHOOLS WERE BEING SHIPPED OUT TO THE COUNTRYSIDE FOR LONG PERIODS TO WORK THE LAND. A U.S. DOLLAR TRADED ON THE BLACK MARKET FOR \$VS 2500. A Tael of gold was \$VS 400,000.

5. THE RESISTANCE: IN SAIGON THERE WAS GENERAL HATRED FOR THE NVA TROOPS. THERE WERE NUMEROUS STORIES CIRCULATING ABOUT SOLDIERS BEING ASSASSINATED IN THE CITY AND NVA TROOPS BEING REQUIRED TO KEEP TO THEIR CAMPS. THE BOY RECALLED THAT DURING ONE AFTERNOON TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO HIS ESCAPE, HE WITNESSED TWO MEN IN ARVN UNIFORMS RIDE DOWN TRUNG HUNG DAO STREET ON A HONDA AND GUN DOWN TO NVA SOLDIERS. THE TWO MEN WERE THEN SHOT DOWN BY OTHER NVA TROOPS WHEN THEY ATTEMPTED TO ESCAPE. THE BOY CLAIMED THAT MANY OF HIS SCHOOL FRIENDS HAD GONE TO JOIN THE RESISTANCE. HE HAD HEARD OF FIGHTING IN CAN THO, TAY NINH, AND DA LAT BUT KNEW OF NO DETAILS.

6. COMMENT: SINCE THIS BOY COMES FROM THE CLASS WHICH BENEFITED MOST UNDER THE GVN AND WAS DESPISED BY THE VIET CONG, HIS STATEMENTS ARE POSSIBLY BIASED. HOWEVER, HIS STORY DOES FIT IN WITH OTHER REPORTS OF A SPREADING DISILLUSIONMENT IN SAIGON OVER "LIBERATION" AND CONTINUED

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RESISTANCE AGAINST NVA TROOPS. WE HAVE, AS YET, NOT BEEN ABLE TO GET A PICTURE OF HOW WELL ORGANIZED THIS RESISTANCE IS OR TO WHAT EXTENT IT IS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AS OPPOSED TO SIMPLE BANDITRY.
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